Life-Long Transformation: A Research Proposal

By Annie Banks

SOC 230 Indigenous Research Methodologies

Francis Adu-Febiri

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Introduction

My name is Annie Banks and I was born on Shawnee territory. My ancestry is English, Irish, French, Welsh and Prussian. My mother was Jennifer Maunsell and her ancestry is French, English, Irish, and Welsh. I have been a visitor on Coast Salish Territories, specifically Lekwungen territory, for 18 years, and I have been a visitor on Indigenous land all of my life. I have been privileged to live, work, learn, study, and write this research proposal on Lekwungen, Esquimalt, Songhees, and Wsanec territory, and for this I am immensely grateful.

I would very much like to thank, honour, and acknowledge the many people who have contributed to this research proposal. Thank you to Francis Adu-Febiri, Todd Ormiston, Sandee Mitchell, Suzanne Bate, Faye Martin, Corrine Michel, Gayle, Joanne, Philippa, Aja, the community of people whom I conversed with throughout this proposal, all of the students in the Indigenous Studies program, our SOC 230 class, and my family.

Abstract

"To be an activist means you need to be a good person; you need honesty, humility. If you jump forward ignoring those things, you're creating superficial change. The epitome of the struggle is not meetings or demonstrations. You can't neglect the internal struggle." (Anonymous Racialized Activist, as cited in Amadahy, 2008, p. 29)

For myself, as a non-Indigenous, white Settler student in the Indigenous Studies program at Camosun College, beginning the process of challenging colonialism within myself requires a re-thinking and unlearning of most of what I have learned in my life, through family, education, media, societal messaging, and the experiencing of my own privileges. Rather than the presupposed notion of "helping" Indigenous people, I feel the work that must be done is in challenging colonial attitudes in Settler society, to change the ideas that keep Settler people "tied to these old ways of thinking and colonialism" (Alfred, as cited in Reece, 2004, p. 30). In order for this unlearning to take place in greater numbers in Settler society, taking a "more proactive responsibility for decolonizing ourselves" and working with Settler people on challenging internalized colonialism is critical, rather than the decolonization process resting "on the back of Indigenous people alone" (Regan, 2005, p.6 , Manuel, as cited in Regan, 2005, p. 4).

"If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." - Lilla Watson/Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s

This re-education must include emotional education; for the high price of emotional illiteracy includes racism, violence, and bullying (Brown, 2010). An increase in Human Factor Competency is also required; to enhance a student's ability to "acquire and apply knowledges, skills, attitudes, habits, emotions, aesthetics, morals and spirit that motivate and empower the self and other people (…) to create and sustain conditions that enhance individual, societal, environmental, and cosmological well-beings" (Adu-Febiri, as cited in Adu-Febiri, 2010).

Problem statement

The purpose of Settler students' studies in the Indigenous Studies Program at Camosun College is commonly misinterpreted as that of "helping" Indigenous people, a problematic notion that is colonial and paternalistic. However, there are Settler students at Camosun College who strive to challenge and unlearn their internalization of colonial behaviour and are seeking relevant programs and actions that support this journey towards challenging colonialism within themselves and society.

Question

How can Settler students in the Indigenous Studies program at Camosun College actively challenge colonialism and oppressive behaviour and attitudes within themselves and society?

Thesis

If challenging colonialism within society means working with Settler people to unlearn internalized colonialism and transform said society, an emphasis on emotional education and an increase in Human Factor Competency is necessary, for without these, a commitment to a lifelong unlearning, creative possibilities for change in self and society, and the repairing and building of relationships is not possible.

Goals & Objectives

I began this research project with Aja Sherlock, who is also a white Settler student in the Indigenous Studies program at Camosun College. She has since left the class but our communication has continued and I will speak more about our relationship later in my proposal. It is with her thoughts that the following was outlined:

Our names are Aja Sherlock and Annie Banks. We are two Settler students of European ancestry, in our second year of the Indigenous Studies program at Camosun College. Our research topic is finding ways in which Settler people can critically self-reflect and decolonize our own Western mindsets, in order to work in solidarity with Indigenous students, individuals and communities and to challenge colonialism in our communities and in society.

The formation of our topic has come from our mutual goal within the Indigenous Studies program, to begin decolonizing our Western mindsets, to engage in challenging our own learned oppressive behaviours, to seek to challenge colonialism and oppression in its many forms and be a part of resistance, revolution, and change.

In addition, I would like to add that my intention in focusing research on myself and other Settler students was to address the issues of a colonial society, rather than placing the "issues" on Indigenous communities or as theirs alone to address. I feel that colonialism is actively perpetuated by all those who are privileged by it and uphold its values and beliefs or stand by and do nothing.

Limitations

Whether non-Indigenous, Settler researchers such as ourselves are or are not able to incorporate their own culture(s) into the research, whether or not they should, and what it would look like if they did. This problem also includes the possibility of appropriating knowledge or utilizing methodologies in an inappropriate way.

The potential for misinterpretation of our research also came up; a common misinterpretation of our being in the program itself is that of the paternalistic notion of "helping" rather than our mutual goal of challenging and unlearning own our internalization of colonial behaviour.

Another problem that will arise is that of our process of decolonizing our own Western mindsets as we go through the journey of research; questions have arisen as to how this will look, what form it will take, and how this will affect our research.

In addition to the goals, objectives and limitations that Aja and I outlined at the beginning of our work together, I would like to also add the following:

In using the term "Settler" throughout my work, I recognize the very limited nature of this word and seek to find ways in which to better address the complexities that exist.

Other limitations that I have been thinking about include the need for action rather than only discussion and reflection, something expressed by a number of community participants in my early stages of consulting community members about my research proposal.

I am constantly reminded of the privileges that I benefit from, which stem directly from colonization, an example being that I live, work and learn on unceded territory of Lekwungen people. How can a Settler person challenge colonialism when one is still very much benefiting from it and also contributing to it?

Definitions of major concepts

Colonialism, in "Colonialism and State Dependency," is defined by Taiaiake Alfred as consisting of things such as the "resource exploitation of indigenous lands, residential school syndrome, racism, expropriation of lands, extinguishment of rights, wardship, and welfare dependency." Alfred goes on to say that colonialism is "made real in the lives of First Nations people when these things go from being a set of imposed externalities to becoming causes of harm to them as people and as communities, limitations placed on their freedom, and disturbing mentalities, psychologies, and behaviours." (p. 2, www.naho.ca/jah/english/jah05_02/V5_I2_Colonialism_02.pdf)

The use of the word "Settler" is described by Adam Barker's in "The Contemporary Reality of Canadian Imperialism: Settler Colonialism and the Hybrid Colonial State" (2009). Barker states that using the term "non-Indigenous" "ignores the complexity of Settler society and culture itself and normalizes non-Indigenous society, preventing much useful analysis" (2009, p. 328). Barker describes Settler people as "most peoples who occupy lands previously stolen or in the process of being taken from their Indigenous inhabitants or who are otherwise members of the "Settler society," which is founded on co-opted lands and resources" (2009, p. 328). This definition is "not comprehensive" as it does not address "complicated hybrid identities that exist in most Settler states," including the descendants of "African peoples brought to the Americas against their will, many refugees, or Settler Muslims who are increasingly targeted by the state and other racist Settlers" (2009, p. 329).

Conscientization, or consciousness-raising, was suggested to me by Richard Spearman (Personal communication, 2010), in place of the word "decolonization," which is critiqued by Maori scholar Graham Hingangaroa Smith as re-centering colonization by putting the colonizer at the center of attention (Smith, 2003). Conscientization, Smith contends, moves away from "reactive politics" and emphasizes both proactivity and positive motivation (Smith, 2003). Conscientization is defined by Paulo Freire as the "process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. Action is fundamental because it is the process of changing the reality." (Freire Institute, 2010) Freire states that "we all acquire social myths which have a dominant tendency, and so learning is a critical process which depends upon uncovering real problems and actual needs." (Freire Institute, 2010)

Knowledge review

In my future research, I will expand my knowledge review to include not only written articles, as this is very limiting. There have been a great many teachers in my life, and it is the knowledge that they have shared with me that I would like to review and include in my future knowledge review.

Although the following paragraph was written as part of my "Methodology" section, I feel it is relevant here and I wish to honour my teachers before proceeding:

Of great importance to mention first are all of the relationships with teachers in my life who have contributed to my learning and whose teachings I rely on throughout my life. While the community that I chose to be the focus of my research proposal is comprised mainly of white Settler people, the initial groundwork was very much laid by many teachers in my life, many of whom are Indigenous and racialized people. Throughout this process I will continue to seek out, read, and refer to readings and teachings of many Indigenous and racialized scholars and teachers, and I feel this is crucial as I seek to challenge my own ethnocentrism, racism, and oppression. However, it is not the job of these teachers and scholars to teach me how to become less oppressive; this is something that I need to take responsibility for myself.

George Manuel, as quoted by Regan (2005, p. 4), states that "Canadians have a different, yet critical role to play on this front – one that we must figure out for ourselves". Similarly, Alfred suggests that a "decolonizing struggle on both sides" is necessary (as cited in Regan, 2005, p.5). These statements reinforce the focus of this research, in that a focus on altering colonial attitudes and ideas in society is critical in relation to the role of people seeking to challenge colonialism and work in solidarity with Indigenous liberation.

 In "Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness," Fyre Jean Graveline quotes Blaut (1998) in a description of decolonization that includes two parts: firstly, Graveline states, "it is necessary to resurrect one's own history and to find out how it has contributed to the history of the world," and secondly, "it is necessary to rewrite colonial history to show how it has led to poverty rather than progress" (p. 37). Within "Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness," Graveline explains her Model for transformative education and describes her want to "contribute to education as the "practice of freedom"" (1998, and Friere, 1972, as cited by Graveline, p. 8). Graveline has here suggested the conceptualizing of one's own history as well as colonial history as methods of decolonization and suggests that education and pedagogy can lead to freedom and liberation. Graveline's work suggests that there is much writing in existence that supports efforts towards individuals unlearning and challenging oppressive behaviour in self and society and being part of transformative change.

Also contributing to a pre-existing body of work are former University of Victoria Indigenous Governance students, Paulette Regan and Adam Barker. In Paulette Regan's "A Transformative Framework for Decolonizing Canada: A

Non-Indigenous Approach," she quotes Taiaiake Alfred as saying "there needs to be a struggle in order to lay out a path to co-existence, and that the process of being uncomfortable is essential for non-indigenous people to move from being enemy to adversary to ally" (2005, p. 3).

Regan states that the gaze must be "turned, mirror-like, back upon ourselves" and that non-Indigenous people must take a more "proactive responsibility for decolonizing ourselves" (2005, p. 6). In her search for a "theoretical and practical approach to non-indigenous decolonization", Regan describes the multidisciplinary literature on transformation that she utilized (2005, pp. 8 – 9). In transformative theory, Regan describes, emphasis is on multiple intelligences and methods of learning (2005, p. 8). Regan also describes the "major theme" of looking beyond western Eurocentric cultural values that privilege "learning discourses steeped in scientific reason, rationality, and objectivity" (2005, p. 8). Adam Barker contends, in "The Contemporary Reality of Canadian Imperialism: Settler Colonialism and the Hybrid Colonial State," that Canadian society "remains driven by imperialism" and that this "society of control" pits Settlers and Indigenous people against each other, to the benefit of government and corporate elites (2009, p. 1). Barker states that, in order to dismantle this "society of control and the hybrid colonial values that it protects," the motivation of Settlers must be dismantled on an individual level (2009, p. 23). Both Regan and Barker write about and inform my research question. Regan speaks directly to a "theoretical and practical approach to non-indigenous decolonization," what she refers to as "unsettling the settler within" (2005, p. 7), and transformative works like Graveline's are immensely relevant to this approach. This confirms the validity of this research proposal, suggests the need for specificity in my focus in order to not replicate research and suggests that further learning will be possible throughout an exploration of the current and expanding literature on the subject.

Methodology

The pattern that I hope to find in my research is that of tangible ways in which Settler people are able to unlearn and challenge oppression and colonialism, work in solidarity, and be part of transformative change in society. Margaret Kovach describes utilizing a decolonizing theory as the "centring epistemology" as one approach, which is "easily associated with transformative research" (2009, p. 80). Methods towards decolonizing oneself as a non-

Indigenous supporter of Indigenous scholarship are laid out by Kovach as beginning with "decolonizing one's heart and mind", knowing the history, and reconceptualising relationships to go beyond "exoticizing the other" (2009, p. 169 – 170). I have approached this research proposal from its inception with the intent of unlearning and decolonizing within my own research practices in order to create positive change in my community rather than inflict harmful practices on anyone. As Kovach states, "many non-Indigenous young people are attracted to Indigenous approaches as well because, I believe, it has to do with a generation seeking ways to understand the world without harming it." (2009, p. 11).

In approaching the collection of information for my research, I plan to continue with the process that I have already started with numerous members of my community. Both Wilson (2008) and Kovach (2009) describe the importance of building and maintaining relationships; this has been in my mind and heart as I have contacted people. In relation to the concept of self as relationship in Indigenous research, Shawn Wilson quotes Stan Wilson as stating that "rather than viewing ourselves as being in relationship with other people or things, we are the relationships that we hold and are part of." (2008, p. 80)

Cora Weber-Pillwax is cited in Kovach as selecting "people she had known for years" and Michael Hart describes the "pre-existing relationship" that he has with his research participants (Kovach, 2009, p. 126). All of the people that I contacted I had pre-existing relationships with, as the depth of my inquiry required that there be a basis of trust already built. Kovach and Wilson both describe using story as a method of gathering information within Indigenous inquiry; I would like to use narrative or story as method for gathering information for my research. In doing this, Kovach describes the need for the research question to be "open enough for the task" as well as the need to decide upon a structure to hear the stories (2009, p. 123).

A conversational method is the method I would like to use, as it "shows respect for the participant's story and allows research participants greater control over what they wish to share" (Kovach, 2009, p. 124).

Ryen, in Kovach, is cited as speaking to the choice of methods as a "solid indicator of the power dynamic at work. The more structured the method, the more control the research maintains" (2009, p. 125). In order to ask for the

participants' input, I wanted to do this in a way that did not put added pressure on them, as I felt that they might not have time or would perhaps not be interested in taking part in my research proposal.

The information that I am seeking from the people that I have selected to participate in my research proposal is information about their personal experiences with or stories of, what working against colonialism and towards solidarity with Indigenous people, within themselves and within society looks like. My research is based on my own want to unlearn oppressive behaviour, move away from centering Western and ethnocentric methods in my work in life and in academia, and explore possibilities for change within society and the rebuilding of relationships with Indigenous people.

The method of analyzing information that I would like to use is synthesis, which is part of an Indigenous paradigm as described by Shawn Wilson, Webber-Pillwax, and Stan Wilson (Wilson, 2008, pp. 116 – 122). In support of utilizing synthesis, Shawn Wilson describes the need to "look at all those relations as a whole instead of breaking it down, cause it just won't work" (2008, p. 119). Wilson suggests that synthesis requires intuitive logic rather than linear logic, to look "at the whole thing at once and coming up with your answers through analysis that way" (2008, p. 119). Shawn Wilson suggests that "the ability of any researcher, Indigenous or otherwise, to utilize intuitive logic requires a lifetime of practice and training" (2008, p. 119).

I want to use synthesis as a method to analyze information because I value the relationships that I am building and synthesis is about building relationships (Wilson, 2008). The formation of relationships through the research, not only between researcher and participants but also between participants is discussed by Wilson (2008). This is important for solidarity building and for creation and implementation of tangible change. Also, the analysis itself can become collaborative, when our accountability to this "shared relational reality" is looked at in synthesis (Wilson, 2008, p. 121).

Synthesis is the methodology that I described as what I would like to use in my analysis. As synthesis is a process that can take a lifetime to utilize, I feel this relates to the unending work that lays ahead if I and my research collaborators are to engage in work that seeks to unlearn oppressive behaviour and create transformative change. Ann Bishop states in her work on becoming an ally, "I do not believe anyone raised in Western society can ever

claim to have finished ridding themselves completely of their oppressive attitudes. It is an ongoing task, like keeping the dishes clean" (2002).

In order to integrate the information that I have gathered through a conversational method and then analyzed using synthesis, I plan to continue to build on the relationships developed through the research to apply our collaborative learnings to our own realities. This relates to Graham Smith's observations that a decolonizing approach provides "hope for transformation", provides roles both for structural change and personal agency, and celebrates Habermas' "notion of finding victories in small struggles" (Smith as cited in Kovach, 2009, p. 80).

A pattern that I expect to find is that this work is and must be a continual process throughout my lifetime and the lifetime of other people working to unlearn oppressive and colonial behaviour and be a part of positive and transformative change. To represent this, I thought of a spiral. The spiral has ancestral and cultural meaning to me, as I have Irish ancestry. In Celtic artwork, the spiral is a commonly seen symbol. In describing her use of the spiral, anti-racist educator Gayle Nye shared with me her appreciation of the unending quality of the spiral. To me, this "unendingness" represents my unlearning work and my commitment to community, transformation, and creating positive change rather than harm. Fig. 1 is a representation of this spiral[1].

Fig. 1: A spiral, representing the "unendingness" of the unlearning process

Reporting & Implementation

In creating this research proposal, I feel that the research, reporting and the implementation has already begun. As my research proposal is centred on how I and other Settler people can address and challenge our own oppressive and colonial behaviours, this has been constantly on my mind. While I am officially not engaging in the research itself, at least on paper, I have of course been involved in many conversations with the community that I have been conversing with, as well as colleagues, family, friends, and interested people. I have sought out resources, researched online, and read books. I have spent many hours thinking and reflecting on these conversations. And through these conversations, I have taken part in community gatherings, reconnected with numerous people who are doing similar work, made connections with people that I might not have met otherwise, begun to build new relationships, and repair old ones as well. It is, as Francis Adu-Febiri has suggested to me, these conversations that are the action plan for my research proposal and research (Personal communication, 2010).

My strategy is to continue to grow and foster these conversations and relationships. I feel that by building strong relationships, the conversations and actions will continue rather than fading away as soon as I finish writing this proposal.

Kovach refers to the centering of giving back to community, in a Nêhíyaw epistemology, and this is what I feel these conversations may be able to do (2009, p. 11). In essence, through having these conversations and activating the crucial and sometimes difficult and uncomfortable questions, I hope that I am giving back to my community by supporting community members and also seeking support in having these conversations. Taiaiake Alfred suggests that the "process of being uncomfortable is essential for non-indigenous people to move from being enemy to adversary to ally" (Alfred as cited in Regan, p.3).

Giving back to community will form a key part of my implementation strategy. Kovach describes the importance of giving back to community, as it is a collective value upon which a relational research approach is built (2009, p. 149). Ensuring that research is "grounded in community needs" and is accessible, useful, and available is crucial in

creating research that gives back to a community (2009, p. 149). Beyond the dissemination of findings, giving back "means creating a relationship throughout the entirety of research" (2009, p. 149).

There are additional possibilities for implementing this research in the future. A student symposium planned for Spring 2011 offers an opportunity for students to present and talk about this research. Collaboration with community members, friends, members of the Indigenous Studies cohort, as well as a planned trip to Cusco, Peru in 2011 to present at the World Indigenous People's Conference on Education are also possibilities for the implementation of this research. In my work with youth, through the Power of Hope and the Youth Custody Centre, I will also have opportunities to incorporate and utilize the learnings from my research and begin and continue conversations.

Just as Wilson has described the "lifetime of practice and training" needed to utilize the intuitive logic necessary for the use of synthesis as a method, I feel that my action and implementation plan will also take a lifetime of practice and training (2008, p. 119). Freire's concept of "praxis" also relates to this lifetime practice as it is not only discussion but action that will lead to transformation (Freire Institude, 2010). Freire describes praxis, or action/reflection, as the need for people to come together not only in dialogue to "gain knowledge of their social reality" but also to "act together upon their environment in order critically to reflect upon their reality and so transform it through further action and critical reflection" (Freire Institute, 2010).

Discussing ethical implications

While much of my research will focus on non-Indigenous and white settler students, I will also be working within the Indigenous Studies Program environment with Indigenous students and teachers and will be often referring to the work of Indigenous scholars. For this reason, I feel that ethics regarding working within Indigenous communities are applicable and so a variety of ethics relating to working in Indigenous communities are those that I plan to follow in my research.

A critical analysis, states Kovach (2009), determines that a societal power dynamic is what allows privileged researchers to "take, take, and take" (p. 142). Problematic practices in Western research done by Western

researchers "reinforce, benefit, and serve outside interests, and do little to assist the community" (Davis, as cited in Kovach, p. 142). These pitfalls of Western research are what I seek to avoid.

As stated by Kovach, "Indigenous research protocols have been developed to protect against ethical misconduct" (p. 143). Regardless of the methodology, "any disrespectful relationship with Indigenous people is colonial and raises ethical quandaries" (p. 143). One element of Indigenous research protocols that Kovach stresses is the responsibility of researchers seeking to work with Indigenous communities who hold their cultural knowledges as sacred (p. 143). The risk of appropriation and diminishment when cultural knowledges are in the public realm or the academy is of "deep concern" among Indigenous researchers (p. 143). Kovach suggests that local protocols, community relationships, and advisory groups can assist in deciphering which knowledge is able to be shared and which isn't (p. 148). This ethical practice I wish to adhere to, so as not to exploit any knowledge shared with me throughout the time of my research.

Confidentiality is another ethical question that will arise in my research. Kovach references the collective protocol of being "accountable for one's words" (p. 148). Western research often does not allow for a choice regarding the anonymity of research participants (p. 148). As I feel it is important to honour the participants and to offer them the choice to name themselves or not, unless there is a great risk to anyone, I would like to offer the choice to any research participants about whether or not they would like to remain anonymous.

Kovach describes the meaning of the Cree word *miýo* as "good, well, beautiful, valuable" and cites Wolvengrey in stating that the word 'ethics' is not differentiated from *miýo* (2009, p. 147). Kovach connects values and ethics as being about *miýo*, about goodness, and relates this to the trusting relationships that can be earned through "following protocol, showing guardianship over sacred knowledges, standing by cultural validity of knowledge, and giving back" (2009, p. 147). With use of methodical protocols and guidelines as well as "attitudinal adjustments," (2009, p. 146) I hope that I can learn and practise ethical research methodologies. Kovach states that these can be learned, if one chooses, and that they must be learned by many, "as adapting to the ethical protocol of another's culture does not come easy" (2009, p. 146). Indigenous scholar Marlene Brandt-Castellano states that Indigenous ethics "are about knowing who you are, the values you hold, and your understanding of how you fit within a

spiritual world" (as cited in Kovach, 2009, p. 146). To work towards these understandings, I feel, will prove to be a lifelong journey, and so the method of synthesis that I hope to utilize in my research will extend to my continual work to integrate these elements of Indigenous ethics into my life and my research.

Funding, costs, and benefits

The funding that I will request will be to cover the costs of the facilitation of further conversations, events and actions. The costs include meeting space (which needs to be accessible which my home is not, as I live on the third floor of a walk-up apartment), food, beverages, bus tickets, calling cards, child care, resources, internet and telephone. All of these items are necessary for the engagement of community members, speakers, guests, and participants.

I plan to request funding from VIPIRG, who is a "non-profit organization dedicated to research, education, advocacy and other action in the public interest" (VIPIRG, 2010), and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, because I feel that these sources would support research such as this and would not impose their own mandates on the results or findings.

The funding that I will require for this research is $15,000. I have listed the costs below for one year.

Costs of Research for One Year

Food and beverages for conversations/discussions/events: $500/mo. x 12 = $6,000

Room rental for events/discussions (accessibility): $200/mo. x 12 = $2,400

Resources (including books, events, films, calling cards, bus tickets, child care, etc.): $500/mo. x 12 = $6,000

Internet & Telephone: $40/mo. x 12 = $480

Total: $14, 880

Schedule

The research has already begun but will officially be reported to begin in January 2011 and will take place over the course of one year, until December 2011. It will then continue throughout my lifetime.

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